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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (02/13): PEACE PROCESS - "BIGGEST
LOSER IN ISREALI ELECTIONS"

Main Stories:

Al Quds leads with news of a Cairo meeting on February 13 between Fatah and Hamas that will prepare for Palestinian reconciliation on talks to take place in Cairo on February 22. Ahmad Quray will lead the Fatah delegation at the meeting and deputy Hamas Chief Abu Marzoq will lead the Hamas delegation. Al Ayyam's front page adds that the operation of the Gaza Rafah crossing will be discussed. The paper also reports that Fatah and Hamas have formed a joint committee to solve the issue of detainees being held in each other's custody. The paper also runs the text of the Egyptian document on "principles of common ground" among the factions. The document was distributed on February 11 to Palestinian factions, the paper reports.

Al Ayyam and Al Hayat Al Jadida lead with similar headlines that Hamas leader Abu Marzoq has confirmed that Hamas has agreed to an 18-month truce agreement with Israel and that Egypt will announce that agreement within the next 48 hours. Abu Marzoq is quoted stating obstacles were overcome related to a possible prisoner exchange deal and that the release of captured Israeli soldier Shalit is no longer linked to the truce. He is also quoted stating that the agreement allows for the opening of all Gaza crossings and halts Israeli "aggressions" on Gaza. Meanwhile, Al Ayyam's front page reports that a Turkish delegation and Hamas leaders in Damascus are discussing a possible prisoner exchange deal between Israel and Hamas.

Al Hayat Al Jadida's front page highlights the February 12 meeting in Washington between Secretary Clinton and Egyptian Foreign Minister Abul Al Ghayt, noting that Clinton will participate in the Gaza reconstruction conference in Cairo. Al Ayyam runs a front page photo of the two officials. The paper reminds readers that Secretary Clinton recently announced that the U.S. will have a

senior representative at March conference. The paper also notes that the U.S. has reservations about funding reconstruction in Gaza because of fears that such funding could be confiscated by Hamas.

Al Hayat Al Jadida runs an AFP front page story under the headline, "the results of the Israeli elections are bad news for President Obama," noting that American experts believe that the "rightwing tendencies" of Israeli voters will "deal a blow" to Obama's efforts for peace in the Middle East. Nonetheless, the paper takes note of statements by the U.S. administration that they are ready to deal with any elected Israeli government to achieve regional peace and security. Al Quds and Al Ayyam also run front page stories on the final results of Israeli elections. The reports predict that Netanyahu's Likud is "almost sure" to form the next Israeli government in Israel depending on the support of other rightist parties.

Al Ayyam's front page reports that President Obama telephoned Israeli President Peres on February 11 and expressed his surprise over the "complicated" Israeli political system. In other U.S. news, Al Hayat Al Jadida's front page reports that Senator Kerry will meet with Syrian President Assad as part of his Middle East tour. The paper notes that the U.S. administration has "kept an open door" to possible dialogue with Syria.

Palestinian Authority President Abbas is conducting a "diplomatic resistance campaign" against Israel and the Hamas policy of armed struggle, according to Al Hayat Al Jadida's front page that cites Israeli daily Haaretz. The report notes that Abbas is on an

JERUSALEM 00000281 002 OF 002

international tour in an effort to isolate the upcoming Israeli "rightwing" government and demand international sanctions on the Israeli government, similar to sanctions imposed on the Hamas "government" when it refused peace negotiations with Israel. The report adds that French, British and Italian leaders have told Abbas that they will not allow the new Israeli government to "obstruct or freeze" the peace process.

A coordination meeting between Palestinian Authority (PA) security commanders and Israeli Army commanders is front page news in Al Hayat Al Jadida and inside Al Quds. The February 12 meeting resulted in an agreement to remove two Israeli checkpoints, Bani Naim near Hebron and Silwad near Ramallah, and the opening of 12 PA police stations in West Bank "B" areas, according to reporting.

Al Quds runs a front page photo of trucks lined up on the Israeli side of the Kerem Shalom crossing, waiting for passage into Gaza. The paper reports that Israel opened the crossing on February 12 for the entry of 130 trucks carrying foodstuffs, of which, 80 were destined for UNRWA and 13 for the private sector. The paper also reports that Israel allowed for the entry of 70 trucks carrying wheat and animal feed through the Karni crossing, and allowed Gazans to export 25,000 flowers to Holland on Valentine's Day.

Al Ayyam's front page reports on an Israeli airstrike on a Hamas police facility in Gaza's Khan Yunis on February 12. No casualties were reported and the paper notes that the station had been bombed before in the recent conflict with Israel. Israel stated that the action was in response to rocket fire from Gaza, the paper concludes. -----

BLOCK QUOTES:

- 1) Al Quds editorial, "The peace process is the greatest loser in Israeli elections"(02/13): "Just as the new U.S. administration and President Barak Obama were ready to intensively engage in moving the peace process forward... by sending envoy George Mitchell to the region, and just as the EU had prepared itself to... support American efforts -just then the disappointing results of the Israeli elections dealt a lethal blow to the peace efforts, setting them back to square one."
- 2) Samih Shabib opines in Al Ayyam under the title "Reconciliation and early elections"(02/13): "The parties to internal [Palestinian] conflict have become well aware that overcoming the internal crisis

is... a crucial matter and that the shortest way to overcome it is by holding simultaneous, early legislative and presidential elections."

WALLES